

Crested Caracara - First Mississippi Record

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On 13 March 1981 while flying a waterfowl survey, we observed a Crested Caracara (Caracara cheriway) on Hillside National Wildlife Refuge. The bird was first noticed as it flew toward and alighted in the top of an oak tree at the edge of the wood line. Field markings observed at this time were its dark belly, whitish dark tipped tail and pale white wing patches. Also noted were the pinkish red face, black on the top of the head and long yellow legs. To the south of the wood line lies a field, and to the west lies an area of open shallow water of approximately 94 acres. We flew by the bird 6 to 8 times and observed the distinguishable characteristics at close range, approximately 50 feet from the bird. The bird did not seem disturbed by the airplane's presence and did not fly as we left the area. Time of day was around 3:00 PM and the weather was partly cloudy, temperature 65° and wind velocity 8-10 mph.

The Caracara was again observed in the same area on 14 March 1981. The bird was first noticed in flight, flying toward the open water area, carrying something in its talons. Once again the white chest, white wing patches, whitish tail and dark belly were observed. As it flew away, I (SMC) observed it lower its head to its claws and tear at the object it was holding.

A considerable amount of food would have been available for the bird. Plentiful in the area were several rodent species, snakes, frogs, lizards, turtles, birds and insects. Fish were abundant in nearby streams and sloughs, and several species of waterfowl numbering close to a thousand utilized the water area near where the bird was sighted. At least one mallard carcass was known to be in the area.

The bird was not seen again after the second sighting of the 14th, although efforts were made to find it.

Photographs were taken and copies were sent to Mr. William Turcotte, who upon studying the slides, accepted the identification. Copies of the slides and/or prints and other documents are also on file at the Mississippi Museum of Natural Science and the Mississippi Department of Wildlife Conservation.

We submit this report with confidence that our identification of a Crested Caracara was correct.